

HAMMARSKJÖLD'S INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

Author:

 Jos Huls^{1,2}
Affiliations:
¹Titus Brandsma Institute, Radboud Universiteit, The Netherlands

²Department of New Testament, University of the Free State, South Africa

Correspondence to:

Jos Huls

email:

jos.huls@TitusBrandsmaInstituut.nl

Postal address:

Titus Brandsma Instituut, Room 13.03, Erasmusplein 1, 6525 HT Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Keywords:

Hammarskjöld; use of the Bible; mysticism; John 13–14; Scripture

Dates:

Received: 23 Apr. 2009

Accepted: 08 June 2009

Published: 05 Nov. 2010

How to cite this article:

 Huls, J., 2010, 'Hammarskjöld's interpretation of the Bible', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66(1), Art. #892, 6 pages. DOI: 10.4102/hts.v66i1.892

This article is available at:
<http://www.hts.org.za>
Note:

Prof. Dr Jos Huls is participating as a research fellow of the Department of New Testament, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

© 2010. The Authors. Licensee: OpenJournals Publishing. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

ABSTRACT

This article describes the use of the Bible in Dag Hammarskjöld's famous and widely read publication, *Markings* (1988). It asks the question whether his use of the Bible reflects his personal experiences or whether it reflects his search for understanding the meaning of his vocation. The article focuses particularly on the relationship between Scripture and the awakening to the mystical process as it comes to the fore in his discussion of the Johannine passage on Jesus' washing of the disciple's feet before the Last Supper (Jn 13–14). In the first section of the article a new, precise version of the text in *Markings* is provided. Then, secondly, Hammarskjöld's interpretation and representation of the contents of the passage are analysed. Finally, some general conclusions about the nature of the mystical process in Hammarskjöld's appropriation of Scripture are given.

INTRODUCTION

The use of the Bible in his book *Markings* poses the question how Hammarskjöld uses biblical texts. Are they convenient paradigmatic illustrations of his personal experiences and discoveries? Or did he during the writing of *Markings* become conscious that Scripture is the paradigm of his life, which enabled him to discover the meaning of his vocation?

The following discussion will analyse a part of *Markings* that focuses on the report of the Last Supper in John's Gospel in which Jesus stands at the centre (Jn 13–14). The analysis will seek to clarify the relationship between Scripture and Hammarskjöld's awakening to the mystical process.

TEXT

The passage in *Markings* that contains the discussion of the washing of the feet requires a fresh translation from the Swedish text:

A young man, adamant in his committed life. The one who was nearest to him relates how on the last evening, he arose from supper, laid aside his garments and washed the feet of his friends and disciples – an adamant young man, alone as he confronted his final destiny.

En ung man, hård i sin livshängivelse. Den som kom honom närmast berättar att han den sista kvällen stod upp från måltiden, lade av sin livklädnad och tvådade sina kamraters och följeslagares fötter - en ung, hård man ensam inför sitt slutliga öde.

He had observed their mean little play for his – his! – friendship. He knew that not one of them had the slightest conception why he had to act in the way that he must. He knew how frightened and shaken they would all be. And one of them had informed on him and would probably soon give a signal to the police.

Han hade sett det lilla spelet om hans - hans! - vänskap. Han visste att ingen av kamraterna insåg varför han måste handla som han gjorde. Han förstod hur skrämde de skulle bli, hur de skulle tvivla -. Och en av dem hade angivit honom och skulle väl snart ge signal till polisen.

He had assented to a possibility in his being, of which he had had his first inkling when he returned from the desert. If God required anything of him, he would not fail. Only recently, he thought, had he begun to see more clearly and to realise that the road of possibility might lead to the Cross. He knew, though, that he had to follow it, still uncertain as to whether he was indeed 'the one who shall bring it to pass' but certain that the answer could only be learned by following the road to the end. The end might be a death without significance, as well as being the end of the road of possibility.

Han hade satsat på en möjlighet i sitt väsen och öde, anad när han kom tillbaka från öknen. Om Gud ville något med honom skulle han inte svika. Först för kort tid sedan hade han tyckt sig se klarare och förstått att möjlighetens vägkunde vara lidandets. Men vetat att han ändå måste följa den, tvöksam om han var 'den som -' men medveten om att svaret kunde vinnas endast genom att följa. Slutet kunde vara en död utan betydelse - utöver den att vara slutet på möjlighetens väg.

Well, then, the last evening. An adamant young man: Know ye what I have done to you? ... And now I have told you before it come to pass.... One of you shall betray me.... Whither I go, ye cannot come.... Will'st thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily I say unto thee: The cock shall not crow.... My peace

I give unto you.... That the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.... Arise, let us go hence.

Sista koällen, alltså. En ung, hård man: Förstår ni vad jag gjort med eder?¹ - Redan nu, förrän det sker, säger jag eder det.² - En av eder skall förråda mig.³ - Dit jag går dit kan du inte följa mig.⁴ - Ditt liv vill dugiva för mig! Sannerligen -⁵ - Den frid jag äger ger jag eder.⁶ - Detta sker för att världen skall förstå att jag älskar Fadern och gör som han bjudit mig. Stån upp, låt oss gå härifrån.⁷

Is the hero of this immortal, brutally simple drama in truth 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world'? Absolutely faithful to a divined possibility – in that sense the Son of God, in that sense the sacrificial Lamb, in that sense the Redeemer. A young man, adamant in his commitment, who walks the road of possibility to the end without self-pity or demand for sympathy, fulfilling the destiny he has chosen – even sacrificing affection and fellowship when the others are unready to follow him – into a new fellowship.

Är hjälten i detta eviga, brutalt enkla drama 'Guds lamm som borttager världens synder'?⁸ Behärskad av trohet mot en anad möjlighet - i den meningen Guds, i den meningen Guds, i den meningen ett offerdjur, i den meningen en återlösare. En ung man, hård i sin livshängivelse, som går sin möjlighets väg till slutet utan självömkan eller behov av medkänsla i det öde han själv valt - offerande också gemenskapen när de andra icke följa, in i en ny gemenskap.

THE COMMUNICATION OF THE THE TEXT

In this text Hammarskjöld reflects on the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples as reported in the Gospel of John, which, according to the tradition, was written by the 'disciple whom Jesus loved'.⁹

1. Cf. John 13:12: 'Sedan han nu hade tvagit deras fötter och tagit på sig överklädnaden och åter lagt sig ned vid bordet, sade han till dem: "Förstår I vad jag har gjort med eder?"' (The Swedish translation of 1917). (So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, *Know ye what I have done to you?* KJV).

2. John 13:19: 'Redan nu, förrän det sker, säger jag eder det, för att I, när det har skett, skolen tro att jag är den jag är.' (Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he).

3. John 13:21: 'När Jesus hade sagt detta, blev han upprörd i sin ande och betygade och sade: "Sannerligen, sannerligen säger jag eder: En av eder skall förråda mig"' (When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.*)

4. Cf. John 13:36: 'Då frågade Simon Petrus honom: "Herre, vart går du?"' 'Jesus svarade: "Dit jag går, dit kan du icke nu följa mig; men framdeles skall du följa mig."' (Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, *Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.*)

5. Cf. John 13:38: 'Jesus svarade: "Ditt liv vill du giva för mig? Sannerligen, sannerligen säger jag dig: Hanen skall icke gala, förrän du tre gånger har förnekat mig"' (Jesus answered him, *Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake?* Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice).

6. Cf. John 14:27: 'Frid lämnar jag efter mig åt eder, min frid giver jag eder; icke giver jag eder den såsom världen giver. Edra hjärtan vare icke oroliga eller försagda.' (Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid).

7. Cf. John 14:31: 'men detta sker, för att världen skall förstå att jag älskar Fadern och gör såsom Fadern har bjudit mig. Stån upp, låt oss gå härifrån.' (But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.)

8. Cf. John 1:29: 'Dagen därefter såg han Jesus nalkas; då sade han: "Se, Guds Lamm, som borttager världens synd!"' ("The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world").

9. According to a long tradition, dating from the second century, the fourth Gospel was written by John, a disciple from the circle of 12. He is also referred to as the

In the first sentence Jesus is pictured by Hammarskjöld as a young man 'adamant' in his committed life. This surrender is expressed by the way in which he humbles himself during the supper before his disciples. Jesus removed his garment and washed their feet as if he were a slave. Subsequently the author repeats the basic attitude of Jesus and the fact that only he acted in this manner.

In the second paragraph the perspective shifts from Jesus to his disciples. In order to underline the atmosphere of friendship, they are named 'his comrades'. However, the disciples display a different attitude by competing for the friendship of Jesus. The repetition of the pronoun 'his' in relation to 'friendship' in this context stresses that from the perspective of Jesus, their action is absurd. The separation between the worlds of Jesus and of the disciples is deepened by their incomprehension of his absolute faithfulness to the road of surrender. He could not act differently than he did. Yet for the disciples this faithfulness to surrender meant the collapse of their world in which they were looking for something to hold on to. One of the disciples would be so unable to escape the grip of his world that he actually betrayed Jesus.

The following part of the text analyses the growth of Jesus' faith in more depth. The temptation in the desert is considered to be the starting point of the calling of Jesus (cf. Mt 1:1–11, Mk 1:12–13 & Lk 4:1–13). From that moment he understood that he had to stand by that vocation. That was the time he became aware that he probably could not escape suffering. He did not fully grasp what this entailed and what his role in it would be. He only knew that in order to receive an answer, he had to walk the road until the end without considering the personal consequences.

After this elaboration Hammarskjöld returns to the scene of the Last Supper. Again he characterises Jesus as an adamant young man. Subsequently he cites some extracts from John 13 & 14.¹⁰ The series of quotations starts with the words that Jesus pronounced after he had washed the feet of the disciples: 'Know ye what I have done to you?'¹¹ Thereupon Hammarskjöld cites two sentences that both belong to the context of the impending betrayal: 'And now I have told you before it come to pass...' (Jn 13:19) and 'One of you shall betray me...' (Jn 13:21). The loneliness that this hostile attitude of one of his disciples causes is intensified by the lack of strength of the other disciples, incapable of being in touch with the road that Jesus is travelling. Consequently Jesus tells Peter, 'Whither I go, ye cannot come.'¹² Also, the following more or less rhetoric question stresses this dissociation: 'Wilt'st thou lay down thy life for my sake!'¹³ Nevertheless the gap is not unbridgeable and Jesus declares, 'My peace I give unto you.'¹⁴ According to the Gospel this peace

(Footnote 9 cont...)

anonymous 'disciple whom Jesus loved'. The authorship is more complicated, though. The text, which is mostly dated between 90 and 100 AD, has certainly undergone a growth process. It may be reconstructed as follows: At the beginning of the tradition from which the Gospel of John has emanated and that goes back to the beginnings of Christianity, there was an authoritative individual: somebody who could have been a disciple of Jesus (one of the 12? John?). Has this figure served as a model for the 'disciple whom Jesus loved'? This disciple should not be regarded only as a symbolic character.

10. For this purpose Dag Hammarskjöld made use of the official translation of the Bible of the Lutheran Church. Translators worked for 144 years and it was finally published in 1917. The title of this translation reads, *Gamla och Nya Testamentet, de kanoniska böckerna, översättningen gjild och stadfast av koningen år 1917.*

11. Cf. John 13:12. The Lutheran state translation renders this sentence as follows: 'Förstår I vad jag har gjort med eder?...'. Hammarskjöld modernises this somewhat archaic wording in the following way: 'Förstår ni vad jag har gjort med eder?' However, this intervention does not change the meaning.

12. John 13:36. The Lutheran state translation renders this sentence as follows: 'Dit jag går, dit kan du icke nu följa mig'. Hammarskjöld intensifies the negation in this passage, replacing 'icke nu' (not yet) with 'inte' (not).

13. John 13:38. The Lutheran state translation renders this sentence as follows: 'Ditt liv vill du giva för mig? Sannerligen...'. Hammarskjöld replaces the question mark with an exclamation mark. In this way the sentence acquires a more peremptory tone.

14. Cf. John 14:27. The Lutheran state translation renders this sentence as follows: 'min frid giver jag eder'. Hammarskjöld changes this to, 'Den frid jag äger ger jag eder' (the peace that is my own I am giving you).

is qualitatively different and cannot be affected by a personal situation.¹⁵ The paragraph concludes with the sentence that forms also the conclusion of John 14, 'That the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.... Arise, let us go hence.'¹⁶ The road of surrender is, in fact, the way of love. This love can reveal itself to us only by travelling the road to the bitter end.

Hammar skjöld then reflects on the meaning of the utterance of John the Baptist, who on seeing Jesus exclaimed, '(see) the lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.'¹⁷ Was there really a divine plan for Jesus to be sacrificed for the sins of the world? In order to find an answer to this question, Hammar skjöld refers to Jesus' unconditional faithfulness to his vocation. This faithfulness made him a sacrificial animal. This reveals Jesus precisely as the way to liberation. The concluding sentence indicates that Jesus has not been passive at all as he travelled this road. He chose to travel the road to the bitter end, even if this would involve the incomprehension of those who followed him. At the same time, he was led into a new fellowship by dying to everything that bound him.

WHAT DOES THIS TEXT MEAN?

This meditation on the last days of the life of Jesus poses one central question: Who was Jesus really and what distinguished him from so many others? The starting point for this question is that Jesus was a human being and that he should not in the first instance be regarded as the Christ who saved humanity. This does not mean that Hammar skjöld wants to demythologise Jesus but rather that he wants to delineate the spiritual growth of Jesus as a process. This is necessary exactly because it is the empathic appreciation of the relationship with God that can take us to the same surrender. In view of this spiritual process it is not surprising that Hammar skjöld puts the beloved disciple on the stage at the outset of his narrative. The reason is that what has to be told can only be perceived with the eye of love. The real story evades our objective view. For this reason we have to learn listening beyond words to be able to understand Jesus.

Jesus as a young man: Remaining true to his vocation

The passage begins strikingly by characterising of Jesus as a young man. In this way Hammar skjöld stresses both the human nature of Jesus as well as his relatively young age. Though tradition tells us that Jesus died at an early age, it remains to be seen whether only a historic fact is communicated in this passage. It seems more likely that the author wants to indicate that death occurs in the midst of life when it is a matter of the relationship with God or the road of possibility. Though Jesus might be young in years, his surrender is really a form of setting himself free, reminiscent of dying. This death cannot be postponed or delayed as something at the end of his life. In this regard the statement that Jesus was 'young' is really about the author cautioning himself.

15.Cf. John 14:27: 'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid'.

16.Cf. John 14:31. The Lutheran state translation reads as follows here: '*men detta sker, för att världen skall förstå att jag älskar Fadern och gör såsom Fadern har bjudit mig. Stån upp, låt oss gå härifrån*'. Hammar skjöld changes this to '*men detta sker, för att världen skall förstå att jag älskar fadern och gör som han bjudit mig. Stån upp, låt oss gå härifrån*'. These alterations do not change the meaning.

17.John 1:29. The Lutheran state translation reads as follows here: '*Se, Guds Lamm, som borttager världens synd!*' Probably influenced by the '*Agnus Dei*' hymn in the liturgy, Hammar skjöld adds the word '*sin*' ('*synd*') in the plural ('*synder*'). This hymn reads: '*O, Guds Lamm, som borttager världens synder, förbarma Dig över oss. / O, Guds Lamm, som borttager världens synder, förbarma Dig över oss. / O, Guds Lamm, som borttager världens synder, giv oss Din frid*.' The English translation reads, 'Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. / Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. / Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant us peace'.

The one who is convinced of a calling has to commit in advance him- or herself already to death.¹⁸

The attitude of Jesus is described as 'adamant'. Nothing will cause him to waiver in his commitment to surrender to life. Hammar skjöld stresses in this way that the exceptional quality of Jesus consists of the fact that he remained firm. Whatever the personal consequences, Jesus remained faithful to what Hammar skjöld subsequently would call his destiny. The phrase 'surrender to life' expresses the intimate relation of Jesus with the Father. In the Gospel of John this relationship is characterised as transparent.¹⁹ Jesus is transparent to God because he was guided in all things by the will of the Father. The same goes for the concept 'surrender' that here gives voice to a fundamentally eccentric attitude to life. By surrendering to life, Jesus lived immediately out of the power of God's love. This love found its natural means of expression in an unrestricted acceptance of life, whatever tensions, hardship or happiness this probably might involve for him personally.²⁰ In this respect the life of Jesus serves as a model for every person with a calling. Vocation demands surrender because it is the only way to come in contact with one's divine source.

The washing of the feet

Immediately after the characterisation of Jesus as a young man who remained true to his vocation follows a paraphrase of the scene of the washing of the feet. This scene ends with the question of Jesus to the disciples, 'Know ye what I have done to you?' (Jn 13:12.)

This image of Jesus who as master and teacher accepts the duty of a slave created ambivalent feelings towards power in the Christian communities. People in important positions were therefore often keen on being portrayed as humble servants with good intentions towards other. Unfortunately they mostly paid only lip service to this desire. In some cases, however, exceptions prove the rule, as is true of Hammar skjöld. Taking up the duty of Secretary General of the United Nations, he characterised himself as 'the international public servant'.²¹ In this passage, however, Hammar skjöld treats the washing of the feet within the context of Jesus' surrender to life. Seen from this perspective, the washing of the feet testifies to an absolute surrender. Following his destiny, Jesus understood that he had no other choice than to travel the road of love to the very end. In this respect love had already crucified him in advance. The image of the slave who washes the feet of the disciples has therefore to be taken as

18.Hammar skjöld was in his forties when he wrote these comments. A conceivable different explanation is that the young age of Jesus has to be interpreted in a spiritual and symbolic way as referring to his inner life. Jesus is 'young' because he lives immediately out of his origin or in Gospel terminology 'in alliance with his Father'.

19.Cf. John 12:44-45: 'Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me' (KJV).

20.Hammar skjöld considers Jesus to be a mystic, as emerges from the following text that describes the reality of the mystics but is generally also valid for the attitude of Jesus: 'But the explanation of how man should live a life of active social service in full harmony with himself as a member of the community of the spirit, I found in the writings of those great medieval mystics for whom "self-surrender" had been the way to self-realisation, and who in "singleness of mind" and "inwardness" had found strength to say yes also to every fate life had in store for them when they followed the call of duty, as they understood it. Love – that much misused and misinterpreted word – for them meant simply an overflowing of the strength with which they felt themselves filled when living in true self-oblivion. And this love found natural expressions in an unhesitant fulfillment of duty and in an unreserved acceptance of life, whatever it brought them personally of toil, suffering – or happiness' Foote (1962:24).

21.Cf. Foote (1962:27) who quotes from a statement by Hammar skjöld to the press on arrival at International Airport, New York, 9 April 1953: 'In my new official capacity the private man should disappear and the international public servant take his place. The public servant is there in order to assist, so to say from the inside, those who take the decisions which frame history. He should – as I see it – listen, analyze and learn to understand fully the forces at work and the interests at stake, so that he will be able to give the right advice when the situation calls for it. Don't think that he – in following this line of personal policy – takes but a passive part in the development. It is a most active one. But he is active as an instrument, a catalyst, perhaps an inspirer – he serves'.

literally as possible. Jesus did not find himself in a position in which he could choose to humiliate himself as a slave. Bound by love, he had literally become the slave of the other, someone who could not claim anything for himself.²² This did not mean that he had no choice anymore but meant that any alternative would represent a denial of love and consequently of the truth.²³

Jesus in his solitude

The first paragraph in the passage concludes by alluding to the introductory remarks with the phrase 'an adamant young man, alone as he confronted his final destiny'. In this way the text not only returns to the firm attitude of the young Jesus but refers also to the fundamental solitude that this attitude encompasses. Jesus is alone as he confronts his final destiny. The reality of the calling has separated him from a structure that allows him to hide behind others. In this respect community does not have more to offer. The only point of reference is the personal relationship with God that reveals his faithfulness to the road.

The calling that places Jesus alone before God also creates loneliness in another way. This is clear from the growing gap between Jesus and his disciples. On the surface they may be a comradely circle of friends, but in reality Jesus and his disciples are greatly separated. The increasing animosity against Jesus could not have escaped the notice of the disciples so that they cling desperately to their Master. Jesus is painfully aware that they live in a fool's paradise.²⁴ They are looking for security in his physical presence, although it is true for them also that they, however much they love Jesus, cannot hide behind him. Even they have to understand that they can rely on nothing else than on the simple reality of a personal relationship with God. In fact, this reality offers nothing else but the destruction and annihilation of everything they were hoping for. As long as they refuse to give up this dream and continue to prefer the logic of protecting their own life above the reality of their calling, they will not understand why Jesus had to act in the way that he did. Their refusal would, on the contrary, cause only more confusion. However, everything was already put into action. Judas had departed and it was impossible to reverse events (cf. Jn 13:27–30).

The inner dialogue of Jesus

The sequel focuses on the inner dialogue of Jesus during the last hours of his life. The author again underlines the human side of Jesus, who is doubting and fails to understand the suffering that awaits him. There is, first of all, a reference to the period preceding Jesus' public ministry when he was tested in the desert. When Jesus was fasting for 40 days in the wilderness, the devil visited him to test him (cf. Mt 4:1–11; Mk 1:12–13; Lk 4:1–13). Hammarskjöld interprets this event as a period of purification that brought Jesus to his vocation. Notwithstanding all temptations by the devil, Jesus knew that he could only move

forward by listening to the voice of God rather than to his own insights. He trusted in this voice and remained faithful to it, despite the suffering that now inevitably seemed to await him on his journey.²⁵ Despite this inner certainty that he had to remain faithful to the road of possibility, he lost any footing in external reality. He might have followed his calling, but his journey had in fact come to an end. The people did not accept his message. Many were even hostile to it. Moreover, he could not even answer the question whether he had a meaningful role to fulfil.²⁶ He realised that the answer could only be found by following the road of possibility to the end.²⁷ Neither did he know whether his death would have any meaning.²⁸ His only certainty was that his death marked the end of the road of possibility.

Subjection

After this reflection on the road of Jesus' calling and the possible suffering that this road would bring, Hammarskjöld goes back to the original subject matter of the Last Supper. He makes a selection from John 14 and 15 and quotes these according to the official state translation of 1917. He starts the series of quotations with the question that Jesus asked his disciples, after washing their feet: 'Know ye what I have done to you?'²⁹ This mystagogic question shows that the washing of the feet has to be interpreted symbolically. Jesus was not literally someone's slave. On the contrary, as an independent mind he did not allow anyone to dictate to him. This applied both to the Pharisees and the Scribes but also to his disciples. However close they may have been to him, he did not allow them to manipulate him. The only one to whom he was accountable was God. Nevertheless, with regard to the disciples Jesus chose the position of a slave and explicitly required them to do the same (Jn 13:15).

25. Hammarskjöld indicates that Jesus had realised shortly before the Last Supper that the road of possibility might be the road of suffering, as is clear from the references made to the chapter that precedes the washing of the feet. At that point Jesus states explicitly that his end is drawing near (Jn 12:23–27).

26. In the text Jesus asks whether he is indeed 'the one who...'. Although the phrase remains incomplete and therefore has to be read in an open way, the question may refer to the meaning of Jesus' death as 'peace offering'. In that case Jesus doubts whether he is the one who has to be sacrificed for the sins of the world. Further on in the text Hammarskjöld asks the question, 'Is the hero of this immortal, brutally simple drama in truth 'the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world?' Here he quotes the words of the Baptist who on seeing Jesus proclaims.... (Jn 1:29–30). In this way John refers to the sacrificial lamb that is slaughtered at Passover.

27. The same tension exists in John 12:27 where Jesus is asking that the chalice of suffering may pass him by. At the same time he realises that he now has to remain faithful to the will of the Father. Hammarskjöld maintains his distance from the thought that God acts as a kind of director of a play. God does not want suffering, but it may overcome us while travelling the road of possibility as the road of vocation. In that case it is imperative to accept this suffering as the consequence of the road that we follow in the name of God. Hammarskjöld wrote in 1958, 'Denna hädiska antropomorfism: att det är genom lidandet som Gud vill fostra oss. Hur fjärran därifrån bejakelse av lidandet när det drabbar oss därför att vi följt vad vi sett som Guds vilja' (Vägmärken 1963:131: 'That piece of pagan anthropomorphism: the belief that, in order to educate us, God wishes us to suffer. How far from this is the assent to suffering when it strikes us because we have obeyed what we have seen to be God's will.' Cf. also Hammarskjöld 1988:158).

28. For Hammarskjöld it is important that Jesus did not know in advance the answer to travelling the road of possibility. He has walked the way to the end, without knowing where that might take him and without knowing what meaning his death might have. Later Hammarskjöld returns to this question in very narrow terms. He writes, 'I detta - som annat - är realism motsatsen till profanering. Den sanningen vi måste bära är verkligheten utan tidens försoning. För den offrade - offrande - gäller endast ett: trohet - ensam bland fiender och tvivlare - trohet trots den förmedling som blivit trohetens följd och förutsättning, trohet utan annat stöd i hoppet om upprättelse än han kan finna i en tro som verkligheten så grundligt synes vederlägga. Ägde offerhandlingen höghet och mening om den offrade sett sig själv i martyriets förklaringsljus? Vad vi tillfogad fanns ej för honom. Och vi måste övervinna det för att höra hans befällning' (Vägmärken 1963:121: 'For the sacrificed - in the hour of sacrifice - only one thing counts: faith - alone among enemies and sceptics. Faith, in spite of the humiliation which is both the necessary precondition and the consequence of faith, faith without any hope of compensation other than he can find in a faith which reality seems so thoroughly to refute. Would the Crucifixion have had any sublimity or meaning if Jesus had seen himself crowned with the halo of martyrdom? What we have later added was not there for Him. And we must forget all about it if we are to hear His commands'; cf. Hammarskjöld 1988:130).

29. John 13:12. The Lutheran state translation of 1917 renders this as follows: 'Förstår I vad jag har gjort med eder?' Dag Hammarskjöld changes this to 'Förstår ni vad jag har gjort med eder?' However, there is no difference in the meaning.

22. Although Hammarskjöld – as appears from the quotations in this passage – is using the official translation of 1917, he does not mention the robe (*överklädnaden*) of Jesus but his body garment or undershirt (*sin livklädnad*). In this way he stresses the complete subjugation of Jesus to his friends.

23. In his explanation of the gesture of washing the disciple's feet Jesus indicates that he is indeed their Rabbi or Master but that as Rabbi he is not driven by power but by love. In the practice of love the whole point is to serve the other person. Jesus desires that the disciples would adopt the same attitude when he will not be any longer present (cf. Jn 13:12–17). As John 13:1 shows, this love finally means the sacrifice of any personal interest. Compare also John 15:13–15. In this passage it is explicitly mentioned that Jesus no longer calls his disciples servants but calls them friends.

24. The disciples' futile struggle for Jesus' friendship is regularly mentioned in the gospels but is not explicitly articulated in this passage. Probably for this reason Hammarskjöld uses the pluperfect. He refers back to experiences from the past (cf. Mk 9:33–37; Mt 18:1–5; Lk 9:46–48). Hammarskjöld strikingly talks about this struggle by repeating the possessive pronoun 'his'. The disciples are fighting for his – his! – friendship, but they fail to grasp that they cannot appropriate it. Jesus cannot be appropriated because in his surrender he has become the property of God.

As mentioned at the beginning of this pericope, Hammar skjöld situates the washing of the feet within the context of the personal relationship with God. Jesus does not follow his own will but the will of the One whom he calls his Father. The image of Jesus who as a slave washes the feet of the disciples indicates that this subjection has an absolute character. In spite of the fact that, humanly speaking, this road seems to end in failure, he has to pursue the voice of his inner self. The question of Jesus, 'Know ye what I have done to you', has therefore first of all to be interpreted from the perspective of this subjection that makes him transparent to God. A slave is not supposed to express his own voice but should embody the voice of the master in word and deed. Jesus, in a similar manner, is totally guided by the voice of his Father.

This subjection to the inner voice makes Jesus independent of others in a rather paradoxical way. He continues to proclaim the voice of God in all things. How can Jesus then say that we have to subject ourselves as a slave to others and in what way is this subjection to be seen in his own behaviour? Jesus does not subject himself to the will of the other person but he subjects himself to the calling of the other, which he detects in his own subjection to the Father. This contemplative gaze turns the other, in the terminology of Hammar skjöld, to our master in God.³⁰ In this respect we also need to strive for subjection (cf. Jn 13:16–17).

Betrayal and death

The following part of the passage depicts a tense situation. Jesus knows that there is a conspiracy against him. Even worse, he knows that the betrayal stems from his circle. 'And now I have told you before it come to pass. One of you shall betray me' (Jn 13:19, 21). This betrayal is at odds with the way in which Jesus is approaching the disciples. He does not exercise power. On the contrary, he sets the disciples free in order to become conscious of their own vocation within this open space. This freedom involved the danger that people would be unable to deal with it and would again prefer the certainty of their logic above the logic of God. There was, however, no alternative because each form of constraint would keep them from the road of possibility that can only be discovered in the open space of their own solitude.

That the road of possibility brings about loneliness is also shown by the subsequent quotation referring to the dialogue that Jesus had with Peter. Peter asks Jesus in a rather innocent way where he is going. Jesus answers, 'Whither I go, ye can now not come yet.'³¹ Hammar skjöld formulates it bolder, omitting the clause of time 'not yet.'³² The next quotation, which is a more or less rhetorical question posed by Jesus, also acquires a stronger meaning when the question mark is replaced by an exclamation mark: 'Will'st thou lay down thy life for my sake! Verily.'³³ An absolute gap exists between Jesus and the disciple who was shortly to betray him but also between him and the other disciples. However much they would like to do so, they are also unable to follow Jesus.

The question at this point is why Jesus is expressing himself so categorically. Does he think that the disciples lack courage to travel the same road as he does? Or does he have knowledge of the road that they still have to travel? It seems as if Hammar skjöld wants to emphasise this last possibility. Jesus is aware of how the disciples cling to him and how hard it will be for them to break

away from him. In their overconfidence they may think that they are able to lay down their life, but they do not understand that Jesus' surrender to life is more decisive than an external act of self-sacrifice.³⁴ For him the relation with God ranks first. In order to experience this fully they will have to give up all things that are not God. This applies also to his life, which as a visible and tangible reality functions as a reference to the beyond. As long as the disciples continue to cling to him and do not dare to face his imminent death, they will not be able to live in him.

In spite of the gap that exists between Jesus and the disciples, Jesus shows in his farewell words that his death does not mean the end of the relationship but marks its new beginning. At that stage the disciples saw Jesus before them, but afterwards they will sense and understand him from within. The disappearance of the support and certainty that they searched for in him will bring them to their essence and make them aware that they have nothing else than this naked faith that makes them live out of God. The quotation 'My peace I give unto you...' likewise refers to this life that passed with Jesus through death. The turmoil in the disciples because of Jesus' death is replaced by a peace that finally comes only from God. In this quotation Hammar skjöld furthermore departs from the official translation, which simply states, 'I give you my peace.'³⁵ It seems that he therefore stresses that the character of this peace is qualitatively different and does not depend upon the personal situation of Jesus. Even the suffering that is in store for him does not seem to disturb the peace of this young man who has abandoned everything. The same is true of the disciples who, because of the death of Jesus, arrived in that open space where they had nothing more to lose.

Hammar skjöld ends this paragraph with the conclusion of John 14, 'That the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.'³⁶ The suffering of Jesus is not an isolated event but has to be viewed in the light of his revelation to the world. It illustrates the meaning of abandoning oneself in God's love. In this paragraph an inclusion can be observed. After washing their feet Jesus asks the disciples whether they understand (*'förstår'*) what he did to them. At this point the same verb is used for the world.³⁷ The meaning of the washing of the feet is explained to the world in his suffering and death. In this way Hammar skjöld characterises the death on the cross as a continuation of the washing of the feet. Both events make visible that Jesus does not keep anything for himself. His surrender to life hands him over to a love that does no longer turn back on its orientation to the other. For Hammar skjöld the love of the Father and the love of the other are not essentially different. In his love of God Jesus surrenders himself to God. In this way he understands that the road of his destiny leads through this surrender. Only so is he driven by God's love so that the miracle may happen through him. This hiddenness that makes him live in God beyond himself brings him to realise that he no longer has any other choice than to walk the road of surrender until the end. Indeed, any alternative that might bring him to depart from this road and opt for himself means the termination of the relationship and therewith of his life in God. The final quotation shows that he adopts an active attitude. He accepts the road of possibility.

30.Cf. Foote 1962:23–24: 'From scholars and clergymen on my mother's side I inherited a belief that, in the very radical sense of the Gospels, all men were equals as children of God, and should be met and treated by us as our masters in God'.

31. John 13:36. The Lutheran state translation of 1917 renders this as follows: 'Dit jag går, dit kan du icke nu följa mig'. ('Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now' KJV).

32. Hammar skjöld changes this quotation as follows: 'Dit jag går, dit kan du inte följa mig'. ('Whither I go, thou canst not follow me').

33. John 13:38. The Lutheran state translation of 1917 renders this as follows: 'Ditt liv vill du giva för mig? Sannerligen.' ('Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily' KJV).

34. Although we have to read the above quotation within the context of the betrayal of Peter, Hammar skjöld, in departing from this context, makes clear that the real surrender consists of the unconditional faithfulness to our vocation. The betrayal of Peter is not so much that he has renounced Jesus for fear of his own life but that he was guided by the human logic of self-preservation. Even readiness to lay down his life for Jesus is inspired by this dynamic. Peter wants to deploy himself with all his strength to promote the cause of Jesus, but he is unaware that in this regard the whole question is finally about what from within is revealed to be the will of God.

35. John 14:27. The Lutheran state translation of 1917 reads as follows here: '*min frid giver jag eder*'.

36. Cf. John 14:31. The Lutheran state translation reads as follows here: '*men detta sker, för att världen skall förstå att jag älskar Fadern och gör såsom Fadern har bjudit mig. Stån upp, låt oss gå härifrån.*' Dag Hammar skjöld changes this into *men detta sker, för att världen skall förstå att jag älskar fadern och gör som han bjudit mig. Stån upp, låt oss gå härifrån.* These changes do not affect the meaning.

37. See the preceding footnote.

By the closing sentence, 'Arise, let us go hence', Hammarskjöld further creates tension with the sequel that refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God. Indeed, Jesus is not in the least a defenceless victim of his own situation. On the contrary, he chooses to pursue the road placed before him by divine providence. The sentence 'See the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world' is from the Gospel of John and is a statement of John the Baptist when he encounters Jesus for the first time in the wilderness.³⁸ John refers to the prophet Isaiah who in the section on the suffering servant of the Lord uses the image of a lamb being led to the slaughter.³⁹ Hammarskjöld here reflects on the meaning of this statement: Did John really want to indicate that there might be a divine plan according to which Jesus as a peace offering had to be immolated for the sins of the world? Again, Hammarskjöld returns to the fundamental attitude of Jesus' faithfulness. Jesus had remained faithful until the end of his life to a possibility, which he had, as Hammarskjöld mentioned earlier on, sensed in the wilderness. This possibility was not a well-defined plan but the road of his calling, which took place unremittingly in the 'yes' of his surrender. In this respect Jesus was uncompromising. He had to travel the road of possibility until the end and to remain faithful to the commissioning of the inner Voice of Love.

By designating Jesus as the Lamb of God, John indicates that not only is Jesus an animal that is destined to be sacrificed for God but God himself is also immolated in this sacrifice. Hammarskjöld distinguishes these two aspects. It was his faithfulness that made Jesus into a sacrificial animal. Jesus allowed himself to be sacrificed, not only by means of his death on the cross but also and above all by means of his inner attitude of surrender. Love had liberated him from everything that bound him to himself. Therefore, God could do to him anything that God wanted. God allowed him to become a sacrificial lamb that had to be slaughtered. At the same time Jesus belonged in his surrender to God (Lamb of God) because therein he was transparent to God. In his surrender he was the incarnation of God's love on earth.

Paradoxically Jesus is a redeemer exactly in being sacrificed. He shows us the road of surrender as the only way to come to life in God rather than to continue trying to remain master of our life. The closing sentence indicates again that he remained faithful until the end to what had placed him on this path. Hammarskjöld formulates clearly how Jesus chose to bear the consequences and not to deviate from his chosen road. Ultimately this meant that he had to let go of everybody who did not understand this surrender and at the same time to hold onto the logic of his own understanding. Once again, paradoxically, he is introduced into the community of the Spirit through the experience of begin freed from everything that keeps him bound to the community.

CONCLUSION

As a true Lutheran, Hammarskjöld was inspired by the Bible and, as *Markings* reveals, especially by the passion story and the book of the Psalms.⁴⁰ *Markings*, as a text from 1951, is the first one of a series of meditations on the suffering of Jesus that were mostly written during Easter. Hammarskjöld quite strikingly understands Jesus as a mystic who, hidden from

himself, lived immediately out of God. This attitude is defined in different ways. In the passage under consideration in this essay, Hammarskjöld speaks in rather abstract terms about Jesus' surrender to life. He does this probably in order to distance himself from the subject and not to regress into stereotyped and traditional Christian terminology. That terminology can easily mislead us to think that we understand the subject matter. Using the term 'surrender' Hammarskjöld refers to an attitude in which we part from ourselves. This attitude is at odds with our normal attitude to life whereby we want to control and play safe. Surrender requires confidence and trust. This confidence and trust are, humanly speaking, foolish, but from a divine perspective, it is the only way to come to life in God. So long as we, out of fear, want to be in control of our life we die, but when we, aware that God is the centre of our existence, surrender ourselves to this Source of life (our Father), we come to life in him. In this life we are no longer the director of our life. We are moved from the inside by the very love of God. Hammarskjöld calls this the road of possibility. In this article I have described it as the road of vocation. We travel this road because we have to listen to our essence, even though we don't know where this journey will take us. In this the life of Jesus is a paradigm because it shows us how somebody remained faithful to the road of his vocation in spite of everything that happened to him on this road. This meditation of Hammarskjöld shows at the same time that in this Jesus relied not on himself but on God who let him travel this road. He no longer had a choice. A return to the road of self-preservation would mean the death and the denial of the road of love. Therefore, he had to follow this road to the end, whatever the consequences for him. Later Dag Hammarskjöld (1988) would write:

For the sacrificed - in the hour of sacrifice - only one thing counts: faith - alone among enemies and sceptics. Faith, in spite of the humiliation which is both the necessary precondition and the consequence of faith, faith without any hope of compensation other than he can find in a faith which reality seems so thoroughly to refute.

Would the Crucifixion have had any sublimity or meaning if Jesus had seen himself crowned with the halo of martyrdom? What we have later added was not there for Him. And we must forget all about it if we are to hear His commands.

We have to acquire a peace and balance of mind such that we can give every word of criticism its due weight, and humble ourselves before every word of praise.

(Hammarskjöld 1988:130)

REFERENCES

- Foote, W., 1962, *Dag Hammarskjöld speeches*, Norstedt & Söners Förlag, Stockholm.
Hammarskjöld, D., 1988, *Markings*, Ballantine, London.

38. John 1:29. The Lutheran state translation reads here, 'Se, Guds Lamm, som borttager världens synd!' Probably influenced by the Agnus Dei hymn in the liturgy Hammarskjöld puts the word 'sin' ('synd') in the plural ('synder'). This hymn reads: 'O, Guds Lamm, som borttager världens synder, förbarma Dig över oss. / O, Guds Lamm, som borttager världens synder, förbarma Dig över oss. / O, Guds Lamm, som borttager världens synder, giv oss Din frid'. ('Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. / Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. / Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world, grant us peace').

39. Cf. Isaiah 52:13–53:12. In Isaiah 53:7 the servant is led to the slaughter as a lamb: 'He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth' (KJV).

40. From the year 1955 we find regularly quotations from the Psalms taken from the English translation of the *Common Book of Prayer*.